

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

CONSUL MUNICH 2092

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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USMISSION USBERLIN

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AMEMBASSY WARSAW

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 BUCHAREST 4904

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SCUL, RO

SUBJECT: CULTURAL PATRIMONY ISSUE AT PLASTIC ARTISTS'
CONFERENCE

REFS: (A) 77 BUCHAREST 3299; (B) BUCHAREST 4843 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. REF (A) REPORTED THAT, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING
THE MARCH 1977 EARTHQUAKE, ROMANIAN AUTHORITIES REMOVED
FORMER PRIVATE, SEMI-AUTONOMOUS ART COLLECTIONS TO STORAGE
IN NATIONALMUSEUM, AND RAZED A CHURCH AND OTHER LITTLE-DAMAGED
HISTORICAL BUILDINGS WHICH MIGHT HAVE COMPLICATED BUCHAREST
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REDEVELOPMENT PLANS. GOR'S TREATMENT OF THE FORMER PRIVATE
ART COLLECTIONS AND OTHER CULTURAL PATRIMONY WAS MAJOR
FOCUS OF CRITICISM AT JUNE 22-23 CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL
UNION OF PLASTIC ARTISTS, REPORTED REF (B). ACCORDING TO
SEVERAL REPORTS OF CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS, COUNCIL OF
SOCIALIST CULTURE AND EDUCATION PRESIDE MIU DOBRESCU

ANNOUNCED THAT FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTIONS ARE TO BE CONSOLIDATED AND RE-HOUSED IN A NEW MUSEUM. ANNOUNCEMENT HAS NOT YET BEEN OFFICIALLY CONFIRMED, AND FATE OF FORMER PRIVATE RESIDENCES WHICH HOUSED MOST OF THE COLLECTIONS REMAIFHS UNCERTAIN. END SUMMARY.

2. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE MARCH 4, 1977 EARTHQUAKE, AUTHORITIES HURRIEDLY EVACUATED NINE SEMI-AUTONOMOUS AND FORMERLY PRIVATE BUCHAREST ART COLLECTIONS TO STORAGE IN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART. OFFICIALLY, MOVE WAS RATIONALIZED AS REMOVAL FOR "SAFE-KEEPING" NECESSITATED BY FEAR OF FOLLOW-ON EARTHQUAKE, ALTHOUGH BUILDINGS HOUSING THE COLLECTIONS HAD SUFFERED LITTLE DAMAGE. COLLECTIONS THEMSELVES, NAMED AFTER FORMER OWNERS ZAMBACCIAN, TATTARESCU, DONA, ISER, BEATRICE AND HRANDT AVAKIAN, GARABET AVACHIAN, OPRESCU, PALLADY, AND SLATINEANU, WERE DONATED TO THE STATE BEGINNING IN 1949, MOSTLY TOGETHER WITH HOUSES, IN HOPES OF AVOIDING DISPERSAL FOLLOWING EXPROPRIATION. COLLECTIONS INCLUDE FRENCH IMPRESSIONIST AND MODERN PAINTINGS, FURNITURE, PREHISTORIC POTTERY, AND ORIENTAL AND ROMANIAN ART. CONDITION OF MOST GIFTS WAS THAT COLLECTIONS BE MAINTAINED INTACT IN EXISTING SETTINGS. SINCE POST-EARTHQUAKE EVACUATION OF COLLECTIONS, PIECES HAVE BEEN EXHIBITED BY THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, BUT FUTURE INTEGRITY OF THE COLLECTIONS AND HOUSES HAS BEEN IN DOUBT.

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3. ACCORDING TO PARTICIPANTS AT RECENT PLASTIC ARTISTS' CONFERENCE, ISSUES OF FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTIONS AND CULTURAL PATRIMONY WERE PRIMARY FOCUS OF CRITICISM. PICKING UP LINE FROM CEAUSESCU SPEECH TO CONFERENCE WHICH DEPLORED WARTIME LOSS OF ART TREASURES AND ASSERTION THAT "WE OWE IT TO THE PEOPLE TO PRESERVE FOR THE CENTURIES THE ART THAT WE HAVE SO DEARLY PRODUCED," SEVERAL DELEGATES ATTACKED GOR TAKE-OVER OF THE COLLECTIONS. THEY POINTED OUT THAT BUILDINGS FORMERLY HOUSING THE COLLECTIONS HAD BEEN LITTLE-DAMAGED IN THE EARTHQUAKE, AND THAT ARTWORKS HAD BEEN HARMED BY CARELESS, HASTY MOVING AND INSUFFICIENT CARE IN STORAGE. SPEAKERS INSISTED THAT THE COLLECTIONS BELONG IN THEIR NATURAL SETTINGS. POST-EARTHQUAKE DEMOLITION OF UNDAMAGED EARLY 18TH CENTURY "ENEI" CHURCH AND THE CERCHEZ HOUSE ON CALEA VICTORIEI, AND NEGLECTED STATE OF SEVERAL OTHER IMPORTANT BUILDINGS WERE ALSO CRITICIZED.

4. MIU DOBRESCU, GOR'S DE FACTO CULTURAL MINISTER, STRONGLY DEFENDED REMOVAL OF COLLECTIONS ON ADMINISTRATIVE GROUNDS. MAINTAINING SO MANY SMALL MUSEUMS, HE ALLEGED, INCURRED EXCESSIVE OPERATING EXPENSES AND LIMITED PUBLIC ACCESS;

HE REPORTEDLY ADMITTED THAT REMOVAL OF COLLECTIONS HAD BEEN DECIDED SOME TIME BEFORE EARTHQUAKE. DOBRESCU ANNOUNCED THAT A NEW MUSEUM ("MUZEUL COLECTIILOR"; "THE MUSEUM OF COLLECTIONS") IS BEING SET UP TO HOUSE THE COLLECTIONS. NEW MUSEUM WILL APPARENTLY BE LOCATED IN PRE-WAR FINANCE MINISTRY BUILDING ON CALEA VICTORIEI. BUILDING IS CURRENTLY WINDOWLESS AND COVERED WITH SCAFFOLDING, BUT ARTISTIC RUMOR-MILL HAS IT THAT MUSEUM IS TO BE READY FOR AUGUST 23 CELEBRATIONS. FATE OF THE LOVELY OLD RESIDENCES WHICH HOUSED MOST OF THE COLLECTIONS IS UNCERTAIN. ALSO, A SERIES OF HISTORIC CHURCHES--SOME NOTED REF (A) AND INCLUDING ST. GHEORGHE THE NEW, THE BISERICA CU SFINTI, ST. SPIRIDON, AND THE BELL-TOWER OF THE PATRIARCHATE--ARE REPORTEDLY SLATED FOR DEMOLITION. WE WILL REPORT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS.

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5. COMMENT. CRITICISM AT THE CONFERENCE PUT DOBRESCU, WHO HAS A REPUTATION FOR ARTISTIC IGNORANCE BUT WHO HAS WORKED FOR ARTISTS' ABILITY TO EXHIBIT ABROAD, IN AN AWKWARD POSITION. "MUSEUM OF THE COLLECTIONS" PLEASES NO ONE IN BUCHAREST ART CIRCLES, WHO PRIVATELY POINT LK UNSUITABILITY OF BUILDING FOR MUSEUM PURPOSES AND CALL IT "A SILO," "AN ART SUPERMARKET." STILL, PERMANENT DISPLAY OF THE COLLECTIONS WILL EASE FEARS OF DAMAGE TO THE WORKS CAUSED BY IMPROPER STORAGE, ALTHOUGH IT IS DOUBTED THAT COLLECTIONS WILL BE DISPLAYED IN ENTIRETY. CONSOLIDATION WAS MOST

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LIKELY MOTIVATED BY DESIRE TO PHYSICALLY INCORPORATE
COLLECTIONS MORE CLOSELY INTO THE NATIONAL PATRIMONY,
AND DISPEL THE IMPRESSION OF THEIR EVER HAVING BEEN
PRIVATELY OWNED.

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